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FOR RELEASE ON RECEIPT

MAJOR LEGER PAINTING ACQUIRED BY THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART

L'Aviateur (The Aviator), painted in 1920 by the modern French master, Fernand Léger (1881-1955), has been acquired by The Cleveland Museum of Art and is now on view in the Museum's galleries. Léger is considered to be one of the four major Cubists, the others being Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque--co-inventors of Cubism--and Juan Gris. L'Aviateur is the final, or "definitive," version of a theme repeated several times by the artist.

The Museum began collecting Cubist works in 1968 with a 1914 collage by Braque; since then it has put together a group of nine major works by Cubism's four greatest masters representing all phases of the movement. Certain types of works by each of these artists were considered to be most desirable and a top quality Léger from the years between 1918 and 1921 was a high priority. L'Aviateur is the only work meeting the Museum's criteria of style and quality to become available to the Museum.

Coming from Norman peasant stock, Léger was a strong, blunt man with a forthright, practical intelligence. He considered the modern, industrialized world to have its own beauty and he willingly used its mechanical forms as subject matter for his art. L'Aviateur was painted after Léger had served in the French army during World War I. He had been fascinated by the new mechanical weapons such as big guns, tanks, and airplanes. The tightly composed L'Aviateur, with its geometrical shapes suggests such things as wings, struts, ailerons, rudders, gunbarrels, and propellers (as well as the circular insignia of the French air force).

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These images are not easily recognizable nor are they arranged to represent the actual appearance of an airplane; instead, they are organized to suggest its general character as a buoyant mechanical object with the formal pictorial composition as the most important consideration. The figure of the aviator is the only clearly recognizable image and even he has a mechanical, robot-like appearance causing him to become a fully integrated element in the composition.

L'Aviateur is one of Léger's finest paintings of this period, maintaining the high level of quality established by the other Cubist works in The Cleveland Museum of Art's collection.

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For additional information, please contact the Public Relations Office, The Cleveland Museum of Art, 11150 East Boulevard, Cleveland, Ohio 44106; 216/421-7340.